



The USS RESCUE, hospital ship that saw service on two fronts during the war, brought liberated prisoners back from Japan after V-J day.

News From the RESCUE

Aboard the USS *Rescue*, Sept. 29—(Delayed).—If any good can come out of the filthy hell-holes that were the Jap prison camps perhaps it was reported today at a medical symposium held aboard the USS *Rescue* returning to the United States when nine Army and Navy physicians, themselves showing the symptoms of starvation and suffering, stood before the ship's doctors and nurses and related their experiences and medical findings during their years of imprisonment.

The physicians were allowed to administer to the patients at the various camps but not until months later when Red Cross medicines arrived were they able to halt the terrific death rates which varied from 30 to 50 per day.

Exact medical findings cannot be reported until the medical officers have had an opportunity to fully appraise their clinical notes—which were often made on the backs of labels from milk cans—and to write fully the results of their studies. Findings, in general, were reported at the symposium. They reported that tuberculosis—and there was a lot of it—did not progress as rapidly among the prisoners as it might have, apparently because of the deficiency of protein in the diet.

The medical officers speaking at the symposium were: Commander Alvin H. Cecha (MC); Maj. Edwin S. Kagy (MC); Lt. Mack L. Gottlieb (MC); Lt. (jg) William T. Foley (MC); Lt. (jg) James E. Eppley (MC); Lt. Comdr. Jack P. George (MC); Capt. (Army) Julian T. Salvador (MC); Capt. (Army) Harold W. Keschner (MC); and Capt. (Army) William E. Wilson (MC).

The above ranks are those held at time of capture.

The symposium was headed by Capt. H. H. Carroll (MC) senior medical officer of the *Rescue*.

Commander Cecha who was the senior medical officer at Guam when captured introduced the speakers. Dr. Cecha in relating his own experiences said that his laboratory under the Japs consisted of one test tube.

The first speaker, Major Kagy, was captured on Corregidor and was one of those assigned to care for the allied prisoners after the "Death March on Bataan." He said the men were dying at a rate of 50 per day from malnutritional diseases, dysentery and diphtheria. The daily food ration was one canteen of water per man, a salmon can of rice, and grass soup. There were no facilities for washing and sanitary fa-

cilities were nil. The only medicine available was a very small supply brought by the physicians. The women of Manila, he said, provided diphtheria antitoxin, but when it arrived the Japs ordered the truck overturned and the soldiers to walk on the glass vials to crush them.

All of the physicians were high in their praise of the sulfa drugs which they were able to obtain through the Red Cross. They said the drug was freely used and it saved many lives. They did not have penicillin nor, as far as they could tell, did the Japs have it. Many of them were able to obtain magazines which described that drug and its uses.

We were able to obtain a great deal of clinical information about beri beri, Dr. Gottlieb, who was captured on Guam, said. Gottlieb was taken to a Japanese camp which formerly had been a barracks for Korean laborers. The sanitation was indescribable. There were many cases of beri beri and tuberculosis. He described how the patients suffering from burning feet, a symptom of beri beri, would immerse their feet in ice water to obtain relief. Many of them froze their feet attempting to ease the pain and amputations were necessary. All of the camps were plagued with boils, he said.

Dr. Gottlieb pointed out that the recent experiments carried on in the United States with conscientious objections on a starvation diet could not hope to duplicate the conditions of a prison camp where the patients were greatly weakened not only by restricted diet but by the diseases which discharged the patient's strength.

Dr. Gottlieb's camp in the last year of the war received great quantities of Red Cross drugs but the Japs would not distribute them to the other camps. Some camps, only 10 miles away, only received the small quantity of drugs that could be smuggled to them when patients were exchanged.

Dr. Foley, who may well have been the first American prisoner of the war as he was the staff physician for the American consulate guard at Tientsin,

China, and was captured 8 Dec. 1941 (7 Dec. Pearl Harbor time). He was awakened by his orderly on that morning and informed his residence was surrounded by Jap soldiers. That was the first news they had that the war had started. They had anticipated war and were planning to move to the Philippines.

Dr. Foley, taking advantage of his many years experience in the Orient, was able to obtain assistance from the Japanese in his medical work. His study of dietary deficiency wherein the men were doing heavy work on 2,550 calories showed that at the end of the first month they developed polyuria, oedema face, bradycardia. The second month they had diarrhea, "electric" or burning feet. The 7th month, retrobulbar neuritis, angular stomatitis, glossitis, and dermatitis had developed. By the 8th month, a peculiar blood blister had developed on the mucus membrane and dry beri beri had begun. The 13th month showed that the diseases of the first month had continued and become general.

Dr. Eppley reported that in his camp men with double pneumonia and severe cases of dysentery were forced to work and as a result invariably died during the night or became so weak during the day they fell from the structures they were working on. After having been to several camps, he was sent to Nagasaki where they were several Dutch doctors who had received sulfa but needed assistance in administering it. With the use of the sulfa they were able to control the pneumonia.

Dr. George was in a camp in Japan that was hit by 70 or 80 fire bombs during one of our raids. He spoke on his experiences in treating the burns.

Captain Salvador was at the Cabantuan prison camp in the Philippines. He said the prisoners were brought to a field, marked out as a hospital, and literally thrown on the ground from trucks. There was no medicine to treat them. Many of them suffered from malaria. During the first 6 months 30 to 50 died per day because the Japs would not supply quinine and other

drugs. Three thousand died before the Japs began to provide any drugs at all. At least one-third of the malaria patients and one-half of the dysentery patients could have been saved with drugs. The Japs sent two medical commissions to the camp to study the causes of the deaths, he said. After many autopsies they agreed with the American doctors on the causes and offered some assistances. One of the commissions was specifically to study the symptom of burning feet. The prisoners called it the "hot foot" commission.

The Japs performed 10 autopsies per day. Dr. Salvador was able to attend the autopsies and make use of the knowledge. He reported that in every case where sulfa had failed to cure a pneumonia case the autopsy revealed other diseases not previously discovered were present causing the death.

After medicines were obtained the patients were divided into groups and given varying dosages of vitamins. Dr. Salvador reported that vitamin B alone would not cure the burning feet. After the Red Cross food packages and drugs began to arrive there were no more deaths from pneumonia, beri beri, dysentery, or diphtheria and the only deaths that occurred at the camp were among the old and those deaths that might normally be expected.

Captain Keschner related similar experiences at his camp in laboratory work.

Captain Wilson reported on the con-

ditions during a transfer of prisoners in a 42-year-old ship when 1,166 patients were forced into a hold, partially filled with coal, about 45 by 60 feet in size. There were no sanitary facilities. The men had to sit on the coal. The temperature was unbearably high and dozens died of heat exhaustion and suffocation. There were 11 ships in the convoy and 6 of them were sunk by our subs before they reached Hong Kong from the Philippines.

The symposium held in the ward-room of the USS *Rescue* was probably unique in medical history. The speakers knew from their own experiences the ordeals of the men they were speaking of. Their own hollow cheeks gave emphasis to their words about starvation. The psychological impact on them of having been both doctor and patient was terrific. They all shared the abject feeling of hopelessness in the early months of being doctors without medicine.

Their clinical notes were taken and kept under the greatest of handicaps. They have not yet had time or are they in physical condition yet as they near the shores of the United States to write a careful account of their experience and relate their medical findings. When they do perhaps those who at some future date must suffer the diseases and effects of starvation may find the ordeal less severe because of the work of these medical officers carried on under the heel of the barbaric Japanese.